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ABSTRACT

Competency-based education can be a viable tool for demonstrating accountability in speech communication instruction. The objectives of speech communication instruction tend to be based more upon the content than upon the everyday communication needs of the students. Rather than continue the approach of basing instruction on assumptions of what constitutes adequate communication, the speech profession needs to make a concerted effort to first determine the personal and professional behaviors that a competent communicator must exhibit. The kind of systematic analysis most appropriate for this task should include at least three strategies: (1) surveys of the literature, (2) surveys of speech communication educators and professionals, and (3) field research of the communication behavior of adults in naturalistic settings. A comprehensive program of the kind discussed, utilizing all available strategies, should result in a model of communication competence and a corresponding list of competencies upon which effective and efficient systems of speech education can be based. (HOD)

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Approaching Competency-Based Speech Education: Standards For Appraising And Building Programs

By

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Approaching Competency-Based Speech Education:

Standards For Appraising And Building Programs

The current emphasis being given to "educational accountability" has had an effect on virtually all aspects of American education, with its greatest impact being seen in the attention given to competency-based instruction.[1] The belief that accountability must be confronted and the competency-based approach is an effective tool for meeting the accountability demand has resulted in such professional efforts as the SCA Memphis Conference on New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication, the joint SCA/ATA Task Force on Teacher Preparation, and the SCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies.[2] This support for competency-based instruction is also reflected in the growing body of literature concerned with communication and career education, of which the position of DiSalvo, et. al. appears highly representative:

> It is now our responsibility to take the idea of accountability seriously in order to insure that students are trained in, and competent in, the communication skills suggested by those currently occupying positions in organizations and business.[3]

This paper supports the notion of accountability and competency-based speech communication instruction. American education and the speech communication discipline will be held more and more accountable, and competency-based instruction can be a viable tool for demonstrating accountability. It is the purpose of this paper to provide a rationale for a communication theory/rhetorical approach to communication competence and to offer a strategy for identifying competency needs in speech education.

A Rationale for a Communication Theory/Rhetorical Approach to Communication Competence

Speech education early in this century reflected a classical linguistic educational model aimed to "prepare the leaders of the culture, leaders who were to be the holders of truth, announcers of certainty, explainers of causality, and possessors of power."[4] Communication was viewed as a linear activity with the source of the message and its content being the concerns of speech education.

Four cataclysmic cultural changes altered the premises which supported this classical Greco-Roman model of speech education.[5] The first was the revelation by Charles Darwin that man was an evolving creature, living in a world of evolving structures and changing functions. From this new perspective of survival of the fittest, man had to ask what human behaviors gave him the best chance for survival. It soon became apparent that man's survival rested upon his intellect and his ability to communicate. As Ernest Becker has observed, "Speech is everything specifically human."[6]

Where Darwin forced man to consider his relationship to the environment, Sigmund Freud turned man's attention inward to the nature and functioning of the human emotional-neurological-somatic system. The role of the symbolic process in the development of the human personality became important and the functions of intra-personal and inter-personal communication as critical factors in healthy organisms became significant. A goal of psychiatric therapy became the returning of the individual to a state of intra- and inter-personal effectiveness.

While Darwin and Freud raised serious questions relative to man's state, Albert Einstein shattered man's beliefs in the laws of nature. Cause and effect relationships once held to yield certainty of truth were now held

to yield only probable truths and degrees thereof. The quest for truth was invariably altered. Relativity entered the vocabulary and significantly influenced the nature of communication.

Finally, economic changes have influenced speech education. A shift from a predominantly blue collar to a white collar society means that man more frequently works with man rather than things. Consequently, economic existence is predicated upon intra- and inter-personal communicative abilities. Moreover, economic changes have made us a more mobile society.[7] Human beings with experiences in languages accumulated in one setting are increasingly finding themselves traveling into other linguistic and semantic environments.

The total impact of these changes is not yet clear. In an attempt to cope with these new postulates, speech, like other academic disciplines, has moved from its original center into expanding segments of specialized study. The Committee on the Nature of the Field of Speech reported:

> Today the specialist in speech may find his interests akin to those of the linguist who analyzes the structure of spoken language, the psychologist who studies verbal behavior, the sociologist who relates social structure to symbolic interaction, the anthropologist who studies the structure of speech and language as reflecting the structure of culture, the philosopher who investigates the problem of meaning in everyday language, and so on.[8]

This has renewed again the quest to discover what we are about. While not addressing speech education per se, a guiding perspective is indicated by James Moffett when he points out in Teaching the Universe of Discourse:

> But English, mathematics, and foreign languages are not about anything in the same sense that history, biology, physics, and

> other primarily empirical subjects are about something. English, French, and mathematics are symbol systems, into which the phenomenal data of empirical subjects are cast and by means of which we think about them. Symbol systems are not primarily about themselves; they are about other subjects. When a student "learns" one of these systems, he learns how to operate it. The main point is to think and talk about other things by means of this system.[9]

Rarely does such a view influence curriculum construction. Instead, we tend to maintain a quasi-classical speech-making perspective, believing that this is what speech is about and forgetting that speeches themselves are about something else. Once we accept the fact that all language situations, or to use Bitzer's label "rhetorical situations," constitute the subject of speech, we are moving in the right direction. As Postman and Weingartner put it in Teaching as a Subversive Activity:

> . . . if one accepts the rather obvious fact that language is almost always produced by human beings for human purposes to share human meanings, then the study of language is inseparable from the study of human situations. A language situation (i.e., human situation) is any event in which language is used to share meanings. A poem is a language situation. So is a joke, an expression of condolence, an editorial, an advertisement, an argument, or TV newscast, a scientific report, a song, a menu . . . each is a situation which is real, may easily be encountered, and is therefore useful to know about. In other words, in studying about how a language works, one has available all the possible forms of human discourse to examine.[10]

Such a view represents a "communication theory/rhetorical" approach to speech education. It is a way of looking at, thinking about, and talking about the world around us. For example, an inflammatory handbill polarizes hostilities in a community and sets off a wave of charges and counter charges. The historian traces this event in its chronological sequences, examining other events that preceded it. The sociologist tries to understand why the communal fabric was severed. The political scientist is concerned with the governmental structure. And the speech teacher sees it as a rhetorical situation, a human event in which language played a central role. S/he also sees in it opportunities for students to understand group behavior, to probe the way words move people to action, to question the words and intent of speakers, to create and construct their own replies--in short explores the applications of communication theories. This is what speech is about. The central proposition is "that every person acquires his/her identity through response to communication, reflects his/her identity through communication, and uses communication as the main method by which he/she seeks to attain his/her human goals."[11]

This approach is not unique to speech education and suggests that the common denominator of a competent communicator is "behavioral flexibility." In other words, a competent communicator is one who is capable of selecting within a wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors those which he or she perceives to be most appropriate for the specific situation and time. He or she must also be capable of evaluating his or her behavior in terms of its appropriateness to the communication context and its interpersonal effectiveness.

Having broadly indicated an approach to communication competence, let's pause for a moment to clarify the nature of competency-based instruction

and its relationship to accountability. Competency-based instruction was advanced as a means of insuring that students would be able to function effectively in their personal and professional worlds. The belief that speech communication educators may not be meeting the needs of students has been best expressed by the participants in the SCA National Project on Speech Communication Competencies:

> In the past, speech communication educators have been discipline oriented. We have taken the concepts and precepts of our discipline as they have emerged on the University level and have tried to force them as far down into the curricula of our schools as it was possible to go . . . We ignored the child's world of communication as we superimposed our own world.[12]

In other words, the objectives of speech communication instruction tend to be based more upon the content, the subject matter of our discipline, than upon the everyday communication needs of our students. It is quite probable that the educational experiences being provided address at least some of the student's needs, but at the moment the appropriateness of our objectives and our instruction cannot be verified. Michael Moore and Gayle Levison, while addressing the 1977 ECA Convention, suggested that the problem is a result of two assumptions upon which speech communication educators tend to base their instruction:

1. that the speech communication educator knows the specific content and experiences necessary to meet a student's communication needs, and/or
2. that the more experiences (and more varied experiences) a student has, the more competent a communicator the student will become.[13]

Moore and Levison continue, indicating that from such pedagogical assumptions "the key question becomes a vague focal point: What 'things' can I have the student learn in this course? However, it is our position that the key question should be: What competencies should the student demonstrate?"[14]

The difference between these two questions represents the difference between the current instructional perspective and a competency-based instructional perspective. The first question suggests that we focus on content and strategies and then develop suitable objectives. This approach is fine if our task as educators is to produce speech majors and minors. However, the second question suggests that we focus first on the specific communication needs of the student. By assuming this perspective, we are no longer course-bound and our task as educators becomes one of developing competent communicators.

Rather than continue the approach of basing instruction on assumptions of what constitutes adequate communication instruction, inherent in a competency-based program is the charge that we make a concerted effort to first determine the personal and professional behaviors which a competent communicator must exhibit. Once these essential competencies (cognitive, affective, psychomotor) are identified, we can go about the task of designing efficient and effective instructional systems to help the students attain those competencies. It is not unreasonable to ask educators to define their goals of instruction in terms of student needs, to specify how those goals are to be achieved, and to determine the extent to which the goals have been achieved.[15] In sum, what is being asked for is: (1) Identify what you'll expect your students to know and be able to do, (2) Identify how you'll know when it's accomplished, and (3) Identify how you'll know that what you're doing is appropriate.[16] This does require a careful assessment

of needs and the development of instructional strategies to meet these needs as well as the establishment of monitoring devices for evaluating instruction.

A Strategy for Identifying Competency Needs in Speech Education

Defining the concept of communication competence and providing guidelines for a competency-based instructional program is one task. Identifying and agreeing upon the specific competencies is quite another. As with a number of concepts in the educational, behavioral, and social sciences, there are as many conceptualizations of communication competencies as there are educators who have attempted to define them. Definitions tend to range from general goals, reflecting various functions that effective communicators and educators should be able to perform, to instructional/planning objectives, to very specific behavioral objectives.

Thus, a specificity-generality question tends to arise in many attempts to develop competency statements. Some educators insist that competency statements are the same as behavioral objectives and proceed to generate, literally, hundreds of them. Other educators suggest that competencies should be stated in more general functional terms and thus concentrate upon developing a more limited set of generally stated function-focused goals. In reality, both approaches are appropriate. Tucker addresses himself to this question when he writes:

> The problem stems in part from the fact that the literature on behavioral goals developed as part of the literature on programmed instruction. Programmed instruction requires the division of learning into the smallest possible steps, or units of reinforcement. Therefore, the presumption seems to be that behavioral goals

should be specific and concrete. A corollary presumption seems to be that, since abstract statements of goals are necessarily less clear than concrete statements, we should expect to clarify abstract goals by making them concrete. The problems which these two assumptions create are best seen in respect to our efforts to develop analytic abilities and to change attitudes. In both cases, as the instructor becomes increasingly specific, he simultaneously reduces the student's range of choice about judgments to be made and the range of creativity which the student can exhibit. Since the development of both judgment and creativity is important, this restrictive effect is a serious problem.

In fact, however, there is no inherent requirement that goals stated in behavioral terms must be specific. Often it may be more desirable to use behavioral goals which are abstract.[17]

In other words, starting at the operational level of behavioral objectives makes it difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at a unified concept of effective communication. This approach alleviates many measurement problems, but it lends itself to the possibility of ignoring or not recognizing outcomes that do not conform easily to the behavioral objective format. The more general function-oriented approach tends to result in a list of competencies that cannot stand by itself. Each competency statement needs to be further operationalized in terms of specific behavioral objectives.

A partial solution to this dilemma exists in viewing competencies on a continuum or as being multi-dimensional where all levels will be addressed. The use of learning hierarchies building to terminal objectives may be helpful in this respect. Haynes elaborates:

> The hierarchial analysis is performed by starting with the terminal skill and successively asking: What must the student already know how to do in order to learn this new capability? The answers to this series of questions form a set of subordinate skills, each of which is a prerequisite to mastery of the terminal objective.[18]

The result is a complete instructional program encompassing overall competencies or end products and respective units of study developing specific skills which lead to these terminal objectives. The net effect is a humanizing of a behavioral instructional program.[19]

With a specifications approach, a general functions approach, or an integrated approach as suggested, there exists the need to identify the relevant competencies. Any attempts to identify competencies must go beyond our own individual assumptions of what constitutes competence and include a systematic analysis of the competencies which the "real" world demands. The kind of systematic analysis most appropriate for this task should include at least three strategies: (1) surveys of the literature, (2) surveys of speech communication educators and professionals, and (3) field research of the communication behavior of adults in naturalistic settings.

The first strategy consists of determining those competencies provided in academic journals and professional texts, as well as those provided in the variety of materials employed in speech communication instruction such as basic course texts, instruction manuals, syllabi, and instructional packages. Of primary focus in this analysis should be the more recent literature in all areas of communication career education.[20] An analysis of this material should provide a theoretical model of communication and education competence which should indicate the competencies that ideally a communicator should be able to demonstrate.

Philip Keezer of SUNY at Oswego has completed an extensive literature review in an effort to identify relevant communication competencies needed for real world lifetime communication.[21] The list consists of interpersonal competencies, small group competencies, and public communication competencies. A number of other sources can be consulted which have attempted to compile a list of competencies as derived from a review of the literature.[22]

The second strategy, surveys of speech communication educators and professionals in such career areas as education, business, and industry, is an attempt to verify the model provided by the foregoing strategy. An analysis of this data provides an indication of the major professional competencies needed by all communicators to function in the real world. Professor Bender of Emerson suggests the following approaches to be used in identifying these professional competencies:

1. Questionnaire. Obtaining information about job conditions and responsibilities through written responses to a series of questions.
2. Critical Incident Technique. Collecting reports of key personal experiences with effective and ineffective performance on the part of practicing professions.
3. Log Diary. Having practitioners describe their activities throughout specified work periods.
4. Checklist. An exhaustive list of task statements that can be used by a worker or an observer to verify which of the tasks are actually part of the job.
5. Observation Interview. Interviewing one or more practitioners at the work site.

6. Work Participation. Involves the direct work performance by the investigator, with or without guidance from experienced professionals.
7. Individual Interview. Interviewing a group of professionals about their practice (generally away from the work environment).
8. Group Interview. Interviewing a group of professionals or experts in the specified professional field.
9. Technical Conference. A group of subject matter experts collectively determine the responsibilities of the position under investigation.[23]

Besides determining general competencies, this strategy can provide an indication of the major communication competencied needed within a specific field of work.[24]

The third strategy requires the study of adult behaviors in naturalistic, real-world settings. Research of this kind is very difficult, but the potential value is obvious. Whereas the foregoing strategies should permit the development of a model of the relevant competencies, this strategy permits testing of the model to determine its validity in a real-world setting.[25]

An integrated program of field research is needed to test the theoretical model and arrive at a more complete understanding of the nature of communication competence. A comprehensive program of the kind discussed, utilizing all available strategies, should result in a model of communication competence, and a corresponding list of competencies upon which effective and efficient systems of speech education can be based.

Summary

The Scottish philosopher John Macmurray said that philosophy "is the attempt to express reality. For reality is essentially the concrete

wholeness which characterizes immediate experience."[26] Any philosophy of speech education should reflect this perspective and it has been with this in mind that competency-based instruction has been approached in this study.

We must face the reality of the need for a new orientation toward speech education: the need to identify students' communication needs, the need for extensive research to develop a model of communication and educational competency from which we can derive instructional strategies based upon a directory of desired professional competences, and the need to become familiar with and to employ some of the new terminology that can be useful in developing meaningful programs. As one speech educator has noted:

> In brief then, the speech education program, because of the peculiar nature of speech, the conditions under which it occurs, and the factors inherent in and the principles governing its development, begins with the individual--his needs, abilities and his immediate environment. Through systematic and progressive instruction it acquaints him with standards and gives him insight and knowledge as a basis for developing natural, normal habits of speaking. Thereby it aids him to develop a general facility in meeting speaking situations and stimulates him to acquire as much skill as his talent will permit in order that when speaking situations confront him in the future he may meet them normally and well.[27]

This study has presented a rationale for competency-based instruction and identified a strategy for locating competency needs. However, it must be viewed as an initial survey. Much still needs to be accomplished. Research must continue in the following directions:

1. Identifying and establishing professional competencies based upon the strategies outlined in this study.
2. Exploring alternative programs and the accompanying skills, attitudes, knowledge and experience and training.

Continuous efforts in this direction will result in our meeting the challenge of accountability and the social responsibility placed upon us as speech educators. As Donald K. Smith observes:

> We speech teachers cannot reform human nature. But we can do a better job of teaching genuine understanding of speech. To the extent that we are right in assuming that most men and most nations hunger for interpersonal and intergroup understanding, our instruction can free these men and nations to pursue this goal. I would not want history, assuming that it can be written, to say this of speech teachers in our century: That in an era torn by dissention, crying out for ways of healing the estrangements of man with man and the animosities of group toward group--that in such an age we taught speech only as a skill, only as an instrument of power, influence, or personal success.[28]

End Notes

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[2]Judson Newcomb and R. R. Allen, New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication (Skokie, Illinois: National Stextbook Company, 1974). Two documents have been produced by the Joint Task Force: "Guidelines for Speech Communication and Theatre Programs in Teacher Education" is reproduced in Speech Teacher, 24 (November, 1975), pp. 343-364, and "Competency Models in Communication and Teatre for Preparation and Certification of

Elementary and Secondary School Specialists and Non-Specialists," is available from the Speech Communication Association. See also R. R. Allen and Kenneth L. Brown, ed., Developing Communication Competence in Children (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1976).

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[4]William E. Buys, et. al., "Speech Communication in the High School Curriculum," Speech Teacher, 27 (November, 1968), p. 20.

[5]Buys, et. al., 21.

[6]Ernest Becker, Birth and Death of Meaning (New York: The Free Press, 1971), cited by Gerald M. Phillips, et. al., eds., in Communication in Education, A Rhetoric of Schooling and Learning (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 4.

[7]Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

[8]Donald K. Smith, et. al., "Report of the Committee on the Nature of the Field of Speech," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 50 (February, 1964), p. 67.

[9]Arthur Daigon and Ronald T. LaConte, "The Creative Curriculum," cited by William H. Evans, ed., in The Creative Teacher (New York: Bantam Books, 1971, p. 159.

[10]Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969) cited by Daigon and LaConte, p. 159.

[11]Phillips, et. al., p. 27.

[12]Allen and Brown, Developing Communication Competence in Children, p. 247.

[13]Michael R. Moore and Gayle K. Levison, "Communication Competencies: Reality or Fantasy," a paper delivered at the ECA Regional Conference, New York City, March 1977.

[14]Moore and Levison.

[15]C. C. Bender, in a paper presented at the ECA Regional Conference, New York City, 1977, entitled "Professional Competencies vs. Student Competencies," adds, "Speech Communication can find a secure place in the educational jungle if we can show that what we teach is directly related to professional competencies."

[16]Dr. Vincent Cazetta, Director of the Division of Teacher Education and Certification, New York State Education Department, in a statement presented at the New York State Speech and Hearing Convention, April 30, 1974.

[17]Charles O. Tucker, "Toward Facilitation of Behavioral Objectives in Speech Communication," Speech Teacher, 22 (September, 1973), p. 233.

[18]Judy L. Haynes, "Improving Instruction in Speech Communication Skills Through Learning Hierarchies: An Application to Organization," Speech Teacher, 22 (September, 1973), p. 238.

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[27]Harry G. Barnes, "Basic Concepts of Speech Education," cited by Keith V. Erickson, ed., Dimensions of Oral Communication Instruction (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1970), p. 37.

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